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UNCLAS SENSITIVE YEREVAN 00952

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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000952

SIPDIS

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DEPT FOR EUR/CARC AND DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AM](#)
SUBJECT: KOCHARIAN'S NEW COMMISSION ON ARMENIAN-
EUROPEAN RELATIONS CATCHES MANY BY SURPRISE

Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

SUMMARY

1. (U) Armenian President Robert Kocharian recently established a new Commission to better coordinate Armenia's collaboration with Europe. The high-ranking commission has been given two months to develop a timeline of "concrete activities" to fulfill Armenia's commitments to the Council of Europe, the European Union and NATO. Deputy Foreign Minister Armen Baiburtian told us July 14 that the Commission does not signal a change in Armenian priorities, but highlights the importance of the Armenian-European relationship and signals an effort by President Kocharian to get his hands around obligations Armenia is making to various European structures. End Summary.

2. (U) The new Presidential Commission on Armenian-European relations held its first meeting on July 13. The Commission is tasked with establishing a timeline and list of implementation actions needed to fulfill Armenia's commitments to European institutions and promote closer ties. The high-level Commission includes National Assembly Speaker Tigran Torosian, Defense Minister Serzh Sargsian, Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian and Trade and Economic Development Minister Karen Chshmaritian.

¶3. (U) The presidential press service said that at the first meeting of the Commission Torosian raised the need to adopt new legislation required by the recently enacted amendments to Armenia's constitution. (Note: The amendments were strongly endorsed by both the Council of Europe and the EU. End note.) The Commission also discussed Armenia's participation in the EU's European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) program and NATO's Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) launched at the end of 2005. MOD Sarkisian and FM Oskanian also briefed the President on their recent visit to Brussels and discussions with senior NATO officials about IPAP implementation.

NO CHANGE IN POLICY...

¶4. (SBU) When asked about the new Commission, Presidential Adviser on National Security Garnik Isagulian told us that European integration remained a priority in Armenia's foreign policy agenda; and that the formation of this Commission did not represent a change in policy. He said the Commission's primary role would be to coordinate Armenia's efforts towards improved integration with Europe.

FROM AN UNEXPECTED SUPRISE

¶5. (SBU) This initiative seems to have caught many officials and Armenia's European counterparts by surprise. The Office of the Special Representative of the Council of Europe told us that the formation of the Commission was unexpected. Head of the NA Foreign Relations Committee Armen Rustamian told us that he was also surprised to learn about the Commission and that his committee was not involved in preparations for the meeting.

¶6. (SBU) Deputy Foreign Minister Armen Baiburtian told us July 14 that President Kocharian sought to understand more clearly Armenia's growing obligations to European institutions. The Foreign Ministry had been required to prepare a matrix with deadlines to all of the various organizations -- including to the EU's European Neighborhood Policy -- in time for the Council's first meeting. Baiburtian told us that the Council was expected to meet quarterly, but could meet at any time.

COMMENT

¶7. (SBU) While the first meeting of this Commission seems to have caught some by surprise, the President's decision to form such a Commission is a positive one which highlights the high priority Armenia places on its relationship with Europe and the need to successfully fulfill its commitments to its European counterparts. It is also an acknowledgement that it can be tough to track all of Armenia's obligations.
EVANS